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THOUGHTS

ON THE

KINGDOM OF IRELAND,

[Appx — II Misc.]
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WRITTEN IN THE YEAR

1785;

During the Debates in the British Parliament, on certain Propositions, commonly called "The IRISH PROPOSITIONS."

THE constitution of Ireland is a mixed Monarchy, similar to that of England, and all its parts are equally balanced for internal peace. The Crown is in the possession and exercise of all its constitutional prerogatives, not only without envy or ill-will, but likewise fortified by other branches of the constitution, which are combined in concurrent interests with the Crown. There is a nobility, and landed gentry, which in every country are the natural and constant supports of a throne. The pride of birth, hereditary honours, and the ambition of the nobility in the public employments, attach them to the Crown. Similar principles in gradation affect the body of the landed gentry; and one common interest of all those persons who possess fortunes unequal and superior to the property of the multitude, ranges them on the part of the Crown, against any republican principles of equalization.

The proprietors of land in Ireland are more bound to the support of quiescent government, than any landed proprietors in any other kingdom in the world. The reason is, because the great landed fortunes of Ireland have at some time or other been acquired under the banners of English settlements. And although much time has elapsed since

these first settlements, nevertheless the most ancient titles might be shaken, if any general convulsion were to happen. Besides these obsolete claims against the oldest English settlements and landed titles, which nothing but general confusion could now revive, it is to be considered, that there are other lurking claims of more recent date, against which a very great body of Irish landed proprietors can have no protection, but in the stability of their government. To go no farther back than to the reign of King James the First, and from thence to the end of that century, viz. to the settlements of Ireland after the revolution, where are the title-deeds, which within that period have not been harrowed up again and again, by inquisitions, confiscations, settlements, revocations of those settlements, re-settlements, &c. together with numberless acts of fraud and violence, attendant upon all these changes? All the proprietors of lands, who are conscious to themselves of being under these circumstances, must be sensible that any searching times of confusion might drive them from their possessions into the wide world. As this class now constitutes the body of the protestant interest in Ireland, it is acknowledged by all parties, that the protestant interest cannot subsist, but by the support of a protestant government, and of a protestant throne. The Protestant Church of Ireland, which may be called a class of spiritual nobility and gentry, are doubly interested in the support of the foregoing principles. All these parties can only secure themselves, by combining their own interests with those of the Crown. They have one common cause, to support the present constitution of mixed monarchy, without any bias or private interest leading towards republican independence.

There is another interest growing up in Ireland, which is at present considerable, though partially distributed; viz. the manufacturing and commercial interest. This is a very important interest, and, as far as it extends, it coincides in views with the foregoing interests. Peace is the harvest of commerce and manufactures. Of all wars, those which are the most destructive to their interests are domestic wars, entailing unquiet possessions and turbulent governments; thereby destroying both the exertions and objects of pacific industry. Besides these obvious interests, by which commerce is attached to quiet go-

vernment, it is to be observed, that commerce partakes of the soil where it is planted. Commerce accumulates property; and therefore in these kingdoms, where the acquisition of land, and every gradation of ascent, is in course of time open to the merchant or the manufacturer, they feel themselves ultimately upon the same bottom with the landed interest. They are impatient to acquire settlements in land, they partake of all its interests, they entail their acquired estates upon their families, and in every respect occupy the places of those who have left them; and thus they fill up a new succession of persons, but still grafted upon the same system of landed interest; and by this succession they are assimilated from time to time into the constitution of a landed kingdom, of which, after their adoption, they become similar and concordant parts.

The consideration of these points is essential in discussing the present state of Ireland, to shew, that although Ireland has claimed and acquired to herself an independence of the legislature of the English Parliament, yet they have no wish or tendency to become independent of the Crown. Their only object has been to acquire the rank and constitution of an independent kingdom, similar in every respect to the mixed monarchy of her sister kingdom. The Crown is therefore now become the bond of union between the two nations.

Ireland has hitherto been a province to the Crown and Parliament of England. The original settlements of Ireland were made by joint adventures of kings of England and of English subjects. The famous laws in the reign of Henry VIIth, commonly called Poyning's laws, which have lately been repealed to give independence to the legislature of Ireland, were originally passed for the protection and security of the English pale and settlers in Ireland. The English settlements in Ireland were at that time in a very crude and hazardous state. It had been found impossible, by the principle of conquest alone, to exterminate the old native interests of the original Irish. Several parts of the country were therefore united from time to time with the English interests, by compromises of treaties and alliances. Such compromises were substituted in default of power, and the effect which they produced, was that of enabling the native interests to contend with the

English interests, in councils as well as arms. It was to defend the settlers against this consequence, as well as to secure the dependence of the settlers themselves upon the Crown, that the famous law of Poyning's was enacted, for notifying the causes of Parliament to the Privy Council in England. It was both an act of union and protection to the settlers. In the subsequent periods from the reign of Henry VIIth to William IIId, although the native interest of the ancient Irish was gradually obliterated, yet a constant succession of national troubles, producing perpetual changes and uncertainties in the state of landed property, there was no permanent body of landed proprietors receiving and transmitting their landed properties in hereditary succession, who could claim the character of the hereditary people of Ireland. From the period of the revolution to the present time, a continued state of civil tranquility and of undisturbed possessions for nearly a century, has organized and drawn forth into form the inherent spirit and faculties of a nation, ambitious to acquire the co-ordinate rank and constitution of that mixed monarchy from which the settlements of Ireland are derived; and under one united Crown to become an independent kingdom.

It is thus that the Irish nation has arrived, through various fortune and successive gradations, to the claims of an independent kingdom. But if it be an honourable ambition which has prompted Ireland to aspire to independent empire, the same ambition will not permit them to stop there, or to leave the corresponding parts of that system unfinished. If from a province they are become an independent kingdom, their first attentions ought to be directed to prepare a new and splendid rank for their Sovereign, now no longer the sovereign of a province, but wearing the national crown of the independent kingdom of Ireland. Having requested a separation from the Parliament of England, which heretofore has acted in concert towards the government and protection of Ireland, it is a debt which they owe to themselves as well as to their Sovereign, to strengthen his hands by an additional civil establishment, suitable to royalty, and similar to the civil establishment of the Crown in England; a royal houshold, a court, a marine, ministers, ambassadors, &c. which would again return to themselves, in offices of honour and trust conferred upon the nobility and gentry of Ireland.

If their Sovereign, having been for many years attached and wedded to a sister kingdom, should condescend to adopt his eldest son and heir-apparent, as the partaker of his thrones, to receive the first coronation of an Irish crown at Dublin; would not the ambition which has called for a king, give him that reception of dignity and honour which would be due to such a king, being the son of their Sovereign, and his representative?

But any such step, or the most distant thought towards it, must alone proceed from the will and pleasure of the Sovereign. It could not however, be considered as any derogation to the Sovereign. *Collega imperii* was a title well known, and frequently in use with the Roman emperors. The occupancy of an united throne by the heir-apparent, would extend the stability of the reigning family upon a broad basis. It would be an augmentation of the dignity of the Crown, without endangering the liberty of the subject. It would not be any accumulation of power in the Crown operative against the liberty of the subject. It would be an enlargement of the circle of regal dominion, in the place of provincial dominion. Every other member and faculty of the constitution, within this enlarged pale of regal dominion, would receive a corresponding increase, which would therefore preserve the balance of the constitution as a mixed monarchy. The nobility, and gentry, and people of Ireland, would acquire importance equal to the splendour of the Crown; the dignity of the Crown and the prosperity of the people would go hand in hand together.

A new creation of an independent kingdom displayed in all its parts, and claiming its rank among the Crowns of Europe, would add a most decided importance to the united empire amongst all foreign nations, as well as to the family of the Sovereign under whom they are united. The transfer of domestic dominion to Ireland, would draw off its subjects from looking to foreign spiritual powers, or entering into the military service of foreign princes. Free liberty of conscience in matters of religion, under a domestic prince, requiring no other tests but those of civil fidelity, would reunite all the divided parts in one national cause, and restore all the sons of Ireland to her own bosom.

The residence of a prince's court would recall the wandering absentee to his native home. It would re-people the country with nobility, gentry, and yeomanry. It would inspire new life into the peasantry, now most dejected and oppressed. Hospitality would smile upon the land, and industry would lay open all its hidden treasures. Manufactures and commerce would carry the glad tidings to the extremities of the earth.——All these blessings may happen to Ireland, if a prosperous issue should attend what has been called their emancipation. That lot is now cast. It will require much temper and moderation to steer successfully towards that prosperous issue. The world is crouded with rival nations, who may not wish to see any prosperous end to these things. This maxim is therefore most infallible; that the most distant tendency to any rupture between England and Ireland would be serving the envious views of foreign rival states, and sacrificing all salutary purposes of our own.

With a domestic prince reigning in Ireland, thereby completing the circle of domestic empire, every possible jealousy arising from the apprehension of external influence would be removed. The Volunteers of Ireland would then become the national and constitutional militia, under the sanction of their own legislature, and under the command of the domestic executive power.

Edward the First gave to the Welch a native prince to reign over them; this indeed was but the favour of a name. The substantial boon which attached Wales to England, being both upon one soil, was their incorporation into one common legislature. Nature does not equally favour a legislative incorporation of Ireland. Ireland, by the immutable laws of nature, is, and always must remain, a distinct and separate island, circumscribed by its own ocean, beyond which nothing can be called domestic. But that which cannot be incorporated, may still be united. The Sovereign may be the bond of union. Ireland has hitherto been a royal farm, unimproved, because unoccupied. It has moved in an eccentric orb, straining heavily upon the distant hand of government. The occupancy of the throne of that kingdom, by the Sovereign's eldest son, if approved by the Sovereign, would relieve the distant pressure, it would restore the equipoise of government, and con-

nect the two islands by the two hands of common sovereignty, instead of one; and in future times even native princes may reign over Ireland.

The delegation of the kingdom of Ireland to the heir apparent, the inheritance being indivisible, would enlarge the scope of action, without dividing the unity of interests. It would be a bond of affection, and of unity of action, within the royal family. It would consolidate the interests of two generations. A royal settlement for the heir-apparent would anticipate a new and splendid sphere of action for the successor, which would reflect its lustre with equal dignity upon the parent Sovereign. It would prevent foreign emigrations, by multiplying the objects of industry, and the means of domestic affluence. It would invigorate and protect the distant parts of the united empire, and fortify its extreme barrier, where the hand of government cannot be in full strength, and where ties of common interest are feeble in proportion.

The decline of empires commences from extreme parts. There are in all the political establishments in the world latent imperfections, coeval with their original constitutions. The superintending eye of domestic government may watch over the first tokens of such defects, and still keep them in a quiescent state: but if they once break out into tumult and contention, various other latent discontents are ever ready to seize the occasion, and to raise their heads. The evils which are first seen are the least part; those which are behind the curtain form the secret and desperate ambush, to encompass national destruction. In such cases the only prudence of government is prevention, or early and pacific remedy.

The infirmities of the constitution of Ireland are too obvious to be mistaken, or to be glossed over with fallacious confidence. They extend no less than to the very elements of civil and religious union The national settlements of landed property have shallow, and therefore precarious roots. In spirituals, a foreign hierarchy hangs over their heads, like a two-edged sword, affecting temporals as well as spirituals, suspended by a single thread. These are the rocks of danger to Ireland.

The new constitution, which they have so earnestly sought for, may be preferable to provincial dependance. It may be a laudable

object of ambition and pursuit; but, on the part of a nation which has two internal feeble parts, the meditated change should be courted, not compelled. The completion of that change, by a fundamental system of political establishment, compact and uniform in all its parts, may afford arguments for its adoption, which the unconnected claims of single and separate parts might not be entitled to. That constitution, if it is to lead to tranquility and permanence, should arise from a general combination of congenial interests, and become the basis of greatness, to those who are to give, and to those who are to receive.

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Cruttwell, Printer, St. James's-Street, Bath.